

Borders that bind ^{AL}

Duxbury woman helping to build library in rural Nicaragua

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Sometimes things just fall into place.

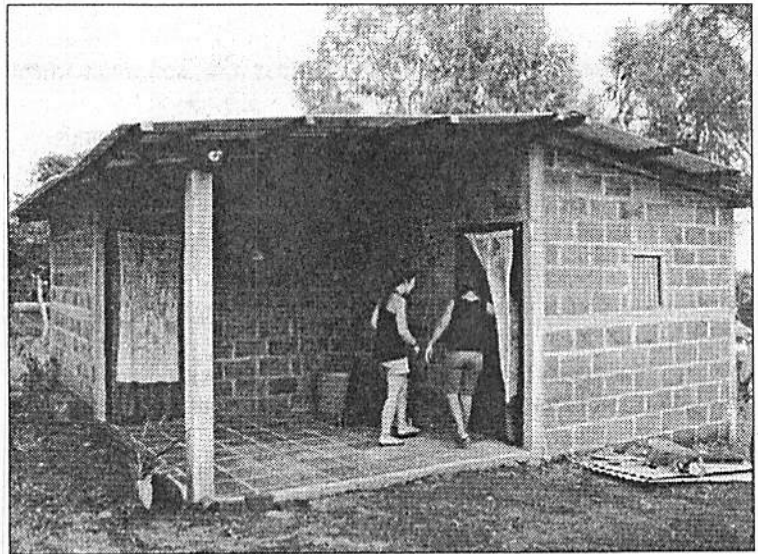
That's how Jacqueline O'Toole felt as she started to get involved with a nonprofit that helps rural villages in Nicaragua.

O'Toole's daughter Catherine is a student at Stonehill College, and she told her mother about a nonprofit called Friends New England, run by a Boston man named Michael Cipoletti.

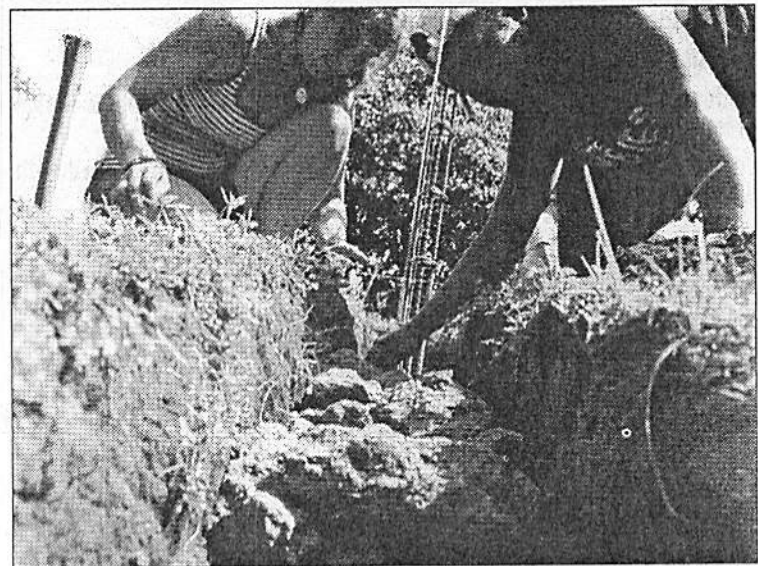
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Jacqueline O'Toole with Wendy, a child she met while doing charity work in Nicaragua.



An example of a home built by Friends New England.



The workers dig trenches, then pour a mixture of homemade cement to make the foundation of a home.

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"I've been wanting to do mission work my whole life," O'Toole said. She's been involved locally with things like food pantries through the Holy Family Church, but says she's always wanted to go to another country on a service trip.

The O'Tooles went to Nicaragua in August, and there they found a calling.

Friends New England is a relatively new nonprofit, having been founded in February 2011, but Cipoletti has been working in Latin America for years. His passion for his work was infectious, according to O'Neil.

"The love that he has for the country and the people – I just looked at him and said, 'What can I do?'"

On the August trip, O'Toole helped build a house for a local family in the rural village of Chacraseca. In Chacraseca, only about 10 percent of the families have electricity, or even running water. While families often have land, they seldom have the resources to build a house. The family that O'Toole helped had been living in a lean-to in front of a pig pen.

The houses cost about \$1,800, and take about two weeks to build. The local volunteers work with a local contractor and the family themselves to pour the foundation, mixing their own concrete and often using crude tools such as shovels with tree branches for handles.

The family also has to pay back 25 percent of the cost of the home within four years, and that money is used to fund



O'Toole is working to build a library in the town of Chacraseca. Pictured are the members of the library committee, a mix of people from the United States and Nicaragua. Back row: Taylor Robbins, Juana Delgado, Jacqueline O'Toole, Jessica Urbina, Meaghan Thompson, Karla Hernandez, Molly Klenowski and Nubia Poveda. Front row: Krystal Tyska, Maria Lourdes Poveda, Kristen Molfetta and Lesner Morales.

the next house in the village. The family also helps out during the construction.

"They don't want anything given to them," O'Toole said.

On the trip O'Toole said she immediately felt drawn to the local people.

"They're very warm and welcoming, I just fell in love with them the first time," she said.

She went back again in September, this time to help out at an even more remote village.

O'Toole owns the ONE gift store and coffee shop in Duxbury Marketplace. She sells a lot of fair trade goods in the store and she's since made connections in Nicaragua. She said she's always wanted to meet some of the people who make goods for her store, and now she can connect faces with names.

"The purpose of my store is to give back," she said.

Anything O'Toole buys from Nicaragua, two-third of the proceeds go back to the country.

She is also helping to raise money to build a library in Chacraseca; to that end, there will be a fundraiser at the Tarkiln building on Oct. 22. She is still soliciting donations for the silent auction, and in particular she wants people to donate service things like gutter cleaning, life coaching, etc.

The library will cost about \$40,000, and that includes things like salary for two librarians, training, computers, wi-fi Internet, and books - although she is hoping people will donate books directly. She

and the folks at Friends New England are hoping that the library will eventually be able to support itself.

"We want to make Chacraseca sustainable," she said. This will be done through a coffee shop located in the library building, which O'Toole will help set up later this year.

Meaghan Thompson, who O'Toole met in Nicaragua and who now works at ONE, will also be traveling to help set up the library. Thompson is getting her masters in library and information science at Simmons College.

"They have the administrative part, but they don't know much about libraries," Thompson said.

The O'Toole family connection to Nicaragua and Chacraseca has remained strong. O'Toole's daughter Elizabeth is currently in the

village teaching English and Spanish, and helping out with library preparations. She'll be in the country until Christmas.

For O'Toole, work in Nicaragua has been something she's been waiting for. As if to illustrate that point, on the flight home from her most recent trip, she met a journalist and his fiancée who were

living in LA but were native Nicaraguans. When O'Toole started telling her story, the fiancée said that her aunt was from the Chacraseca area and has been looking for a place to sell her jewelry.

"It's amazing when something is meant to be, people are put into place," said O'Toole.